Stennis May Back Curb on CBW Tests

8-9-69

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Senate critics of the Pentagon's chemical and biological warfare programs appeared on the verge of a major victory last night, as Armed Services Committee Chairman John Stennis (D-Miss.) said he is "inclined to support" an omnibus anti-CBW amendment.

The amendment, introduced late yesterday, was put together by Sen. Thomas J. McIntyre (D-N.H.) and a bloc of eight liberals who had introduced proposals of their own to curb CBW activities. It will be voted on Monday when the Senate continues debate on the $20 billion military procurement bill.

Stennis said he wants to take a final look at the compromise language over the weekend, but he expects to back it and believes "it will go through the Senate" in the Monday vote.

"The Pentagon isn't crazy about these amendments, you know," he said, "but we've got to get some form of control over these activities. I feel that this is a rather solid start on the problem."

Stennis is floor manager of the military procurement bill and his expected endorsement of the amendments virtually insures their adoption.

He indicated that the key to acceptance of the package was revision of language originally sponsored by Sens. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis,), Charles E. Goodell (R-N.Y.), Harold Hughes (D-Iowa) and William Proxmire (D-Wis.).

Their original version would have flatly barred any open-air testing of lethal chemical agents or disease-producing organisms.

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The revised language inserted in the McIntyre amendment permits exceptions to the prohibition if the Secretary of Defense finds a test to be necessary for national security and the U.S. Surgeon General finds that the test will not endanger public health. It also requires advance notice of tests, with all details, to be given to Congress.

Senate leaders had hoped to reach a vote on the CBW amendments late yesterday, but that expectation collapsed entirely when the Senate wrangled for hours over an earlier amendment by Thomas Eagleton (D-Mo.) which would kill further funding of the main battle tank (MBT-70) until a General Accounting Office study of the project's costs and prospects.

Eagleton said the tank, being developed by the U.S. and West Germany as a "dream tank" for use in West Europe, has escalated 528 per cent in costs for research, development, testing and engineering and is still nowhere near ready for production.

When Stennis and Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) objected, Eagleton agreed to withdraw it temporarily while the GAO did a rapid preliminary study. If the GAO report is not received by the time action on the procurement bill is nearing completion, he will reoffer the amendment.

Also yesterday, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) told the Senate that he found "not acceptable" an offer by the Secretary of Defense to brief the committee on the details of a military contingency plan with Thailand.

He said he wants to see the document itself.

The plan provides for action to be taken in case of aggression or threatened aggression against Thailand, and was signed by a U.S. general. Fulbright said it provides for commitment of substantial U.S. troops to Thailand under certain circumstances and "I believe it does go beyond the SEATO commitment" to which the Secretary of State had argued it was limited.

The McIntyre anti-CBW package contains these provisions in addition to the one on open-air testing:

- Requires semi-annual reports to Congress on CBW spending, and bars procurement of any further delivery systems for lethal chemical and disease agents.
- Bars CBW activities not found by the Secretary of State to comply with international law.
- Bars the transport of CBW agents without notice to Congress and the foreign nation involved if the locale is overseas, and bars shipment within the U.S. if the Surgeon General determines it is a health hazard or if the purpose is disposal and the agent is not detoxified.

The Senate is scheduled to go on its summer vacation after the close of business next Wednesday. There appears to be little possibility that it will finish action on the procurement bill before then, but Stennis said he hopes he can wind up within a week after Congress returns Sept. 3.

Sen. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) rejected suggestions that the recess be curtailed because of the press of business and was backed by Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen (R-Ill.)